

ART. IV.—*The Hatching of a Peripatus Egg.*

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In *Nature* for 17th September, 1891, I briefly described some eggs of the larger Victorian *Peripatus*, which were laid by specimens kept alive by me in the winter (Australian) of 1891. At that time, following previous authority, I identified the species which laid the eggs as *P. leuckartii*. It appears now, however, that the real *P. leuckartii*, at any rate in New South Wales, is undoubtedly viviparous, and our oviparous Victorian species is therefore probably distinct. It may be remembered that in *Nature* for 14th February, 1889, I suggested this probable distinction on account of the remarkable pattern of the skin usually exhibited by the fifteen-legged Victorian form. Further particulars on this subject are given in my "Further Notes on the Oviparity of the larger Victorian *Peripatus*, generally known as *P. leuckartii*,"* and in the literature cited therein. In that paper I also described two embryos removed from eggs which had been laid for about three and eight months respectively. In the latter case I showed that the embryo was possessed of the full number of appendages and was in all respects a perfect young *Peripatus*, differing externally from the adult only in the smaller size and less deeply pigmented skin. On the strength of those observations I claimed to have definitely proved that the larger Victorian *Peripatus* at any rate sometimes lays eggs, and that these eggs are capable of undergoing development outside the body until perfect young animals are produced. I am now able to add some further information.

For some time only one egg (belonging to the original lot, for none have since been obtained) remained in the hatching-box. The shell of this egg had changed to a dark brownish colour, and latterly an embryo had been visible through the shell, coiled up

* Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria, vol. v., p. 27. (Also published in the *Annals and Magazine of Natural History*, 1892).

inside. The egg was lying on a small piece of rotten wood which rested on the glass floor of the hatching-box.

On 3rd January, 1893, not having opened the box for some days, I made an examination. The egg was in its former position, so far as I could tell, but the shell was split on one side and the young *Peripatus* had escaped. This young *Peripatus* was found lying dead on the glass bottom of the hatching-box, 25 mm. distant from the shell. It must have crawled off the rotten wood and along the glass to the position in which it was found. It was only about 5 mm. in length, so that, even assuming that it moved in a perfectly straight line, it must have crawled for a distance five times its own length.

To the naked eye the young animal appeared of a pale greenish colour. It cannot have been dead for very many days, but decomposition had already set in and the animal was stuck on to the glass on which it lay. It was impossible to remove it without considerable injury, but I ultimately succeeded in mounting it in Canada balsam, and it is impossible, even in its present condition, to doubt that it really is a young *Peripatus*, for the characteristic jaws and claws are well shown. I also mounted the ruptured egg-shell, and found that the characteristic sculpturing on the outside was still clearly visible.

This egg, then, hatched out after being laid for about seventeen months (from about July, 1891, to about the end of December, 1893). I cannot believe that under natural conditions the embryos take so long to develop. They were possibly retarded by being kept in a very cool room. At any rate it now appears certain that the larger Victorian *Peripatus* lays eggs which may hatch after a lapse of a year and five months.
